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(54) **METHODS AND APPARATUS FOR PROVIDING REMOTE DIAGNOSTICS TO A TELEVISION RECEIVER**

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CPC H04M 3/533; H04M 1/6505

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See application file for complete search history.

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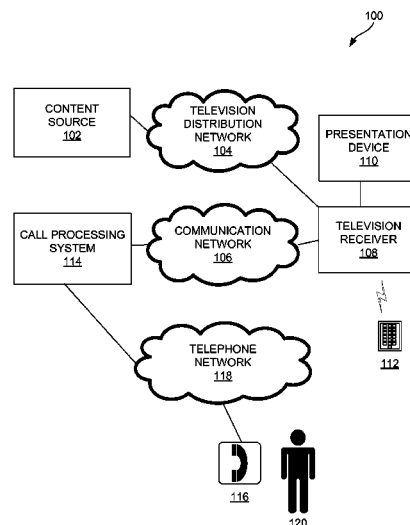
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ABSTRACT

Described herein are techniques for allowing a customer support agent to remotely analyze a television receiver. A television receiver is communicatively coupled to a customer support center through a communication network. A customer support agent remotely accesses the television receiver and the television receiver transmits video content to the customer support center through the communication network. The video output is outputted to the customer support agent at the customer support center for analysis of the television receiver.

20 Claims, 4 Drawing Sheets



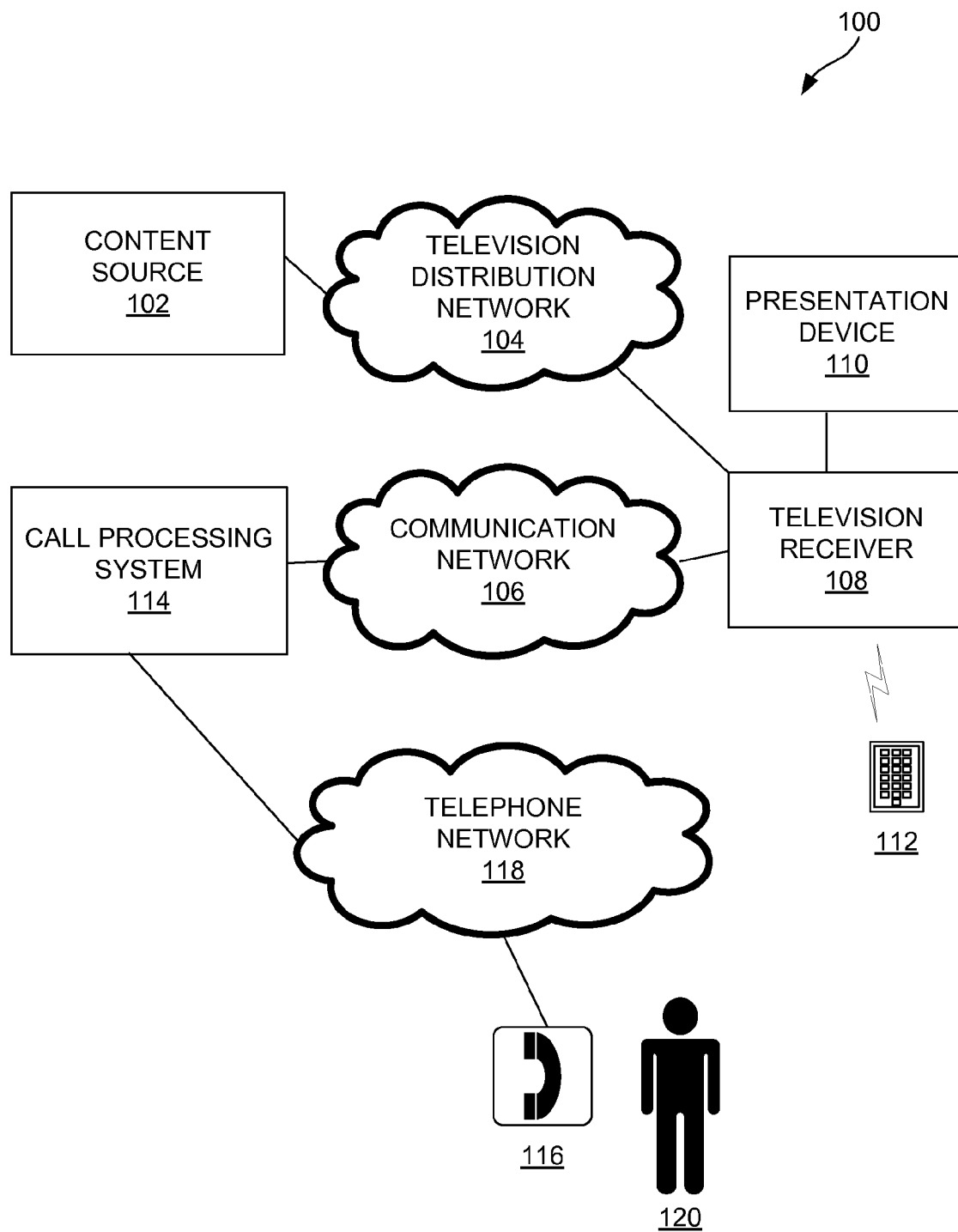


FIG. 1

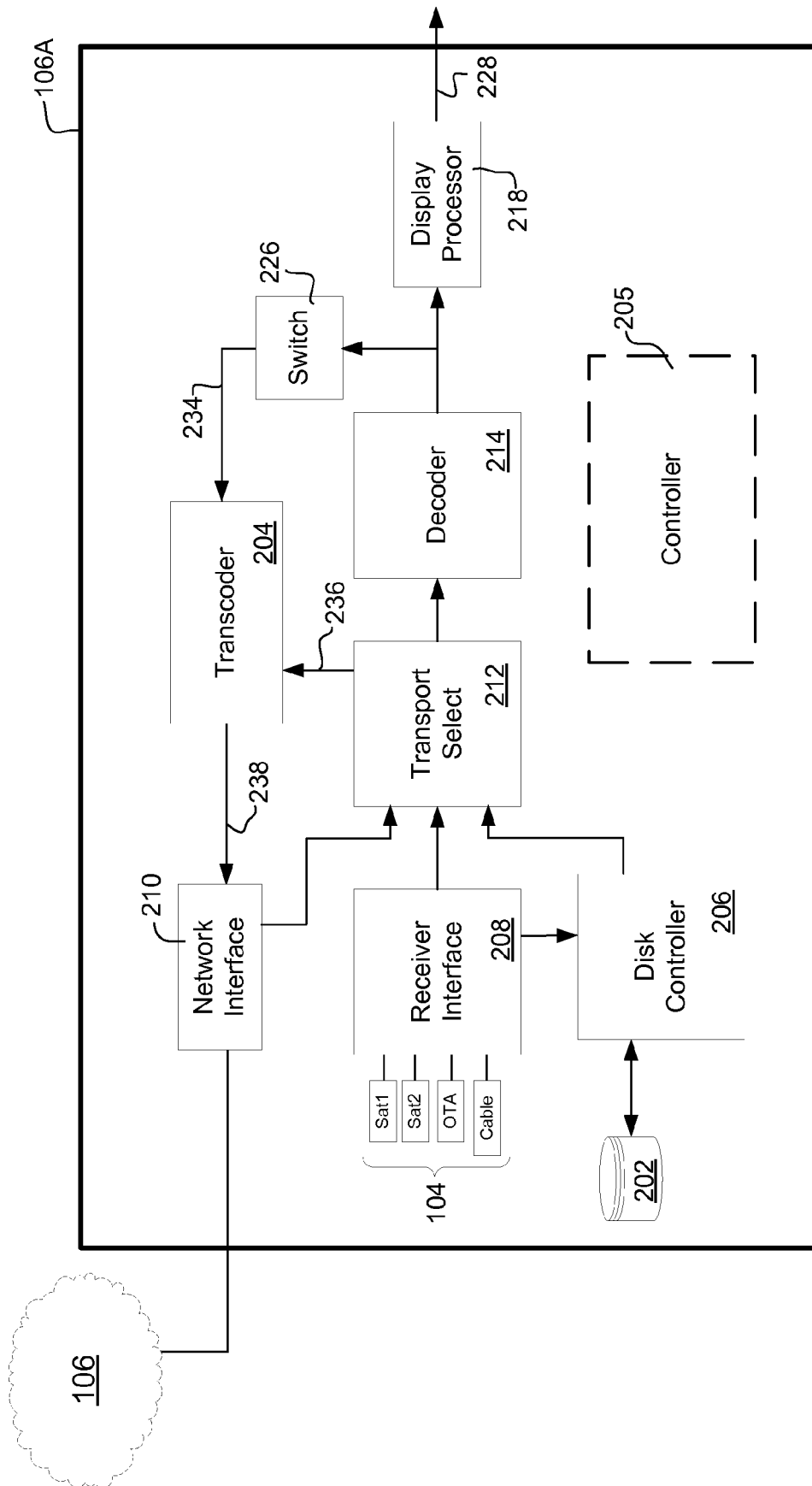
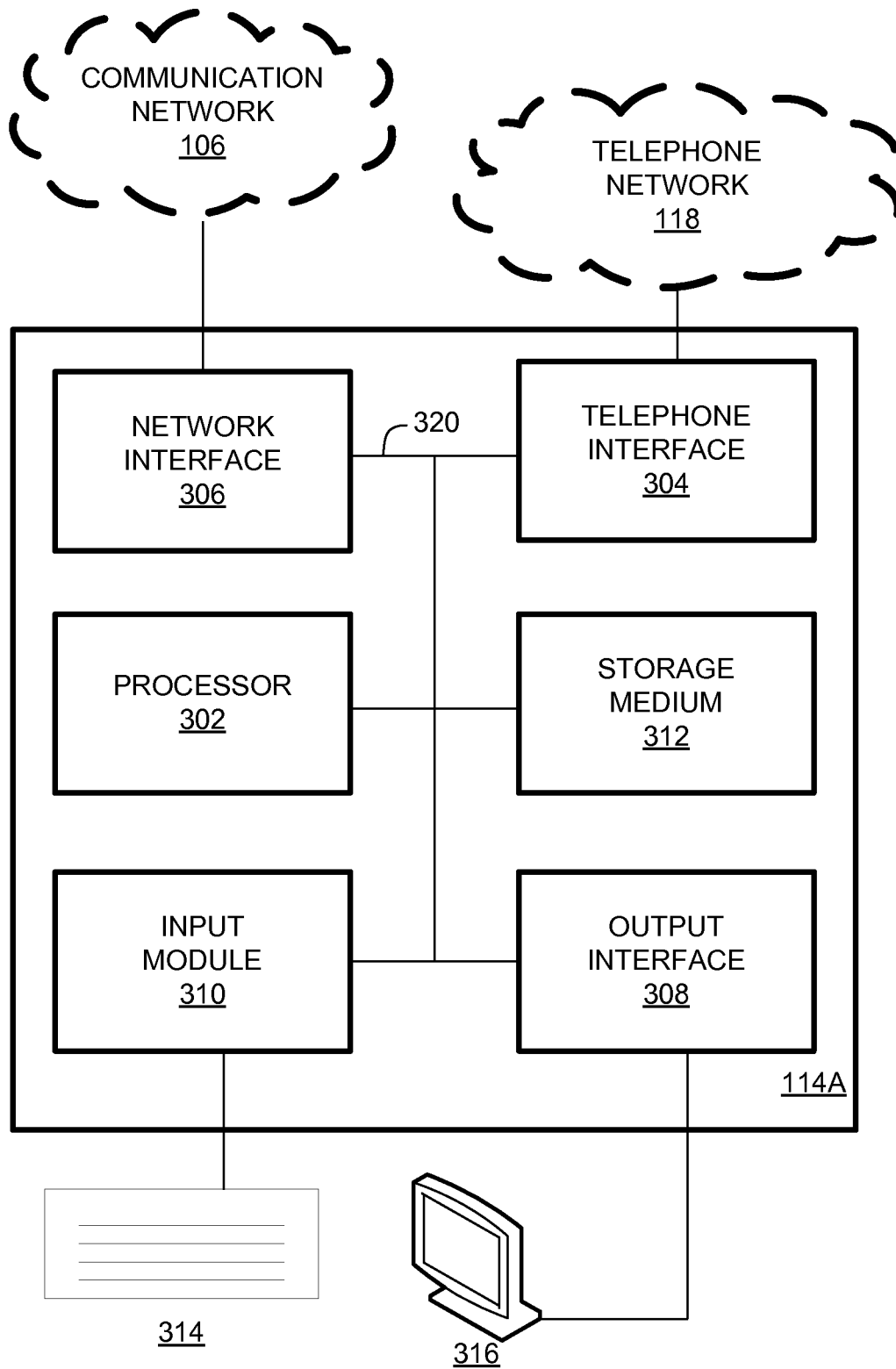
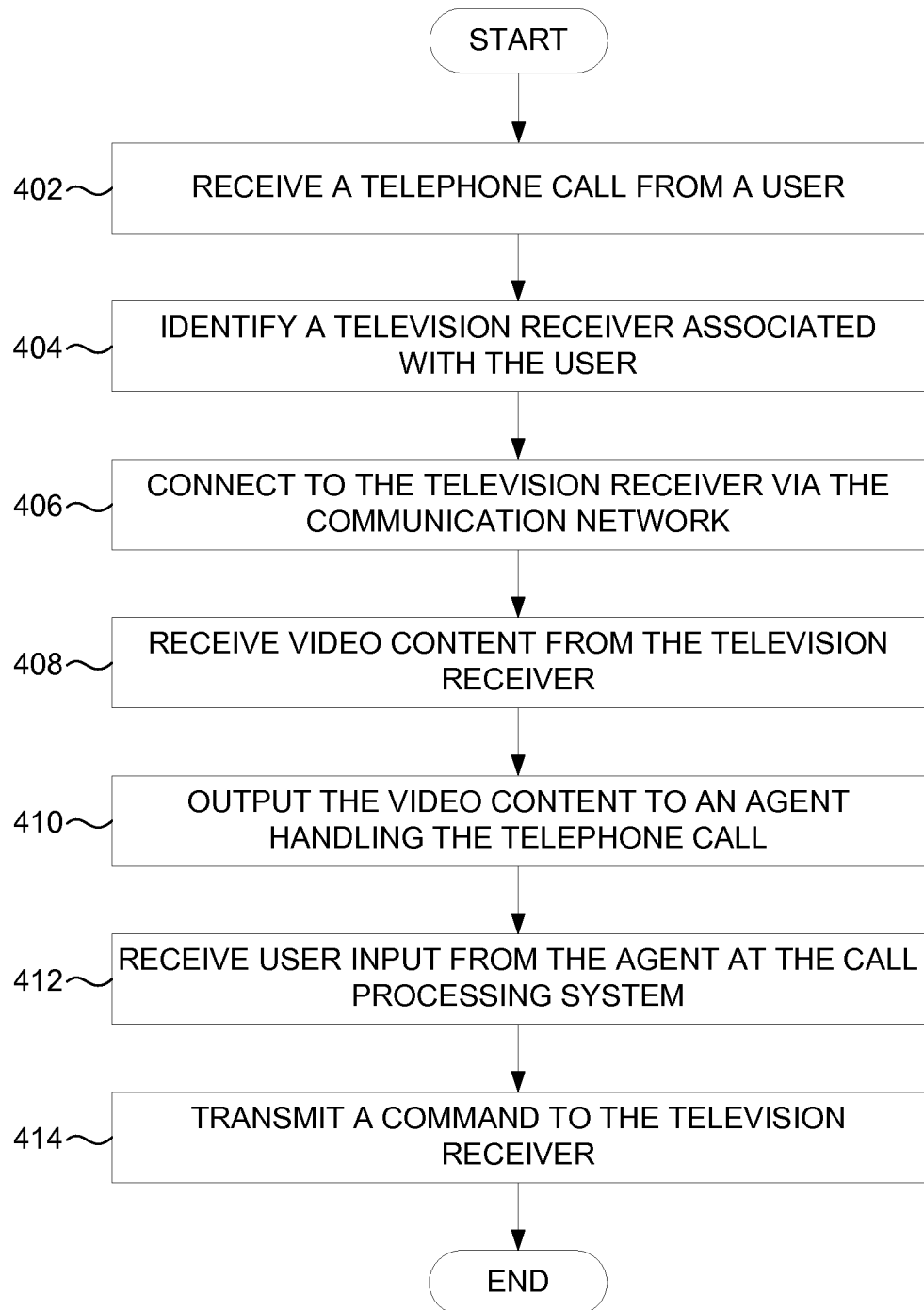


FIG. 2

**FIG. 3**

**FIG. 4**

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METHODS AND APPARATUS FOR PROVIDING REMOTE DIAGNOSTICS TO A TELEVISION RECEIVER

CROSS-REFERENCES TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This Application claims priority to U.S. Non-Provisional Application Ser. No. 12/612,441, filed Nov. 4, 2009.

BACKGROUND

Television distribution networks and associated receiving equipment, such as set-top boxes, are often very complicated equipment. There are many hardware components, features and settings which may have potential problems within the television receiver. When a user of the television receiver calls customer support, a customer agent may walk the user through various troubleshooting procedures, trying to determine the source and/or remedy for the problem. Because the television receiver is located remotely with respect to the customer support agent (CSR), the CSR is unable to see the output of the television receiver or input commands to the television receiver. Therefore, it may be difficult for the customer agent to correctly diagnose a problem with the television receiver from the remote location. Often, the agent will order a technician out to physically look at the television receiver or have the customer physically return the television receiver to the operator for observation. Both options cost the operator significantly more money than having a customer support agent diagnose and remedy the problem over the telephone. Thus, it would be desirable for the customer support agent to have more flexibility to remotely diagnose problems on a customer's television receiver.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The same number represents the same element or same type of element in all drawings.

FIG. 1 illustrates an embodiment of a communication system.

FIG. 2 provides additional detail about an embodiment of a television receiver.

FIG. 3 illustrates an embodiment of a call processing system of FIG. 1.

FIG. 4 illustrates an embodiment of a process for processing a customer support request.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Described herein are systems, methods and apparatus for allowing a customer support agent to remotely diagnose a television receiver. More particularly, described herein are techniques for customer support agents to remotely access and view the video output of a television receiver. Additionally, the customer support agent may be able to remotely enter commands into the television receiver, changing the operation of the television receiver. In short, described herein are systems, methods and apparatus for remotely connecting a customer support system to a television receiver.

One embodiment comprises a method for processing a customer support request. The method includes receiving, at a call processing system, a telephone call from a user and identifying a television receiver associated with the user. The method further includes connecting the call processing system to the television receiver via a communication network and receiving video content, at the call processing system,

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from the television receiver. The method further includes outputting the video content to an agent handling the telephone call, e.g., via a computer, web interface or the like. Thus, the agent can remotely view the video output of the television receiver and more easily diagnose problems with the television receiver or rule out various problems which may have been expected to exist. In at least one embodiment, the remote agent provides user input requesting to remotely control the television receiver. The user input is transmitted from the call processing system through the communication network to the television receiver and processed by the television receiver.

Another embodiment comprises a television receiver. The television receiver includes a receiver interface that receives input video data from a television distribution network and a network interface communicatively coupled to a call processing system located remotely with respect to the television receiver. The network interface is operable to exchange data with the call processing system. The television receiver also includes a processor communicatively coupled to the receiver interface and the network interface. The processor is operable to receive a command, via the network interface, from the call processing system, the command requesting the processor to change at least one operating parameter. Responsive to the command, the processor generates output video data and initiates transmission of the output video data to the call processing system.

Another embodiment comprises a call processing system. The call processing system includes a telephone interface operable to receive a telephone call from the user. The call processing system also includes a processor operable to identify a television receiver associated with the user and generate a request to communicate with the television receiver and a network interface communicatively coupled to the television receiver through a communication network. The network interface is operable to connect to the television receiver responsive to the request and receive video content from the television receiver. The processor is further operable to initiate output of the video content to an agent at the call processing system.

FIG. 1 illustrates an embodiment of a communication system 100. The communication system 100 includes a content source 102, a television distribution network 104, a communication network 106, a television receiver 108, a presentation device 110, a remote control 112, a call processing system 114, a telephone 116 and a telephone network 118. Each of the components of the communication system 100 will be described in greater detail below. The communication system 100 may include other components, elements or devices not illustrated for the sake of brevity.

The content source 102 is operable for receiving, generating and communicating content to one or more television receivers 108 through the television distribution network 104. The content to be received, processed, outputted and/or communicated may come in any of various forms including, but not limited to, audio, video, data, information, or otherwise. In at least one embodiment, the content source 102 is operable for receiving various forms and types of content from other sources, aggregating the content and transmitting the content to the television receiver 108 through the television distribution network 104. It is to be appreciated that the content source 102 may receive practically any form and/or type of information from one or more sources including streaming television programming, recorded audio or video, electronic programming guide data, video on demand, receiver applications and the like.

The television distribution network **104** is operable to transmit content from the content source **102** to the television receiver **108**. The television distribution network **104** may comprise any type of wired (e.g., cable and fiber) and/or wireless (e.g., cellular, satellite, microwave, and other types of radio frequency) communication medium and any desired network topology (or topologies when multiple mediums are utilized). Exemplary television distribution systems **104** include terrestrial, cable, satellite and internet protocol television distribution systems. In at least one embodiment, the television distribution network **104** broadcasts or multicasts content to a plurality of television receivers **108**. The television distribution network **104** may also distribute content to a specific addressable television receiver **108**, such as video-on-demand content and the like. In at least one embodiment, the content source **102** may be embodied as a transmission facility of the television distribution network **104**. Exemplary content sources **102** include over-the-air (OTA) terrestrial transmission facilities, cable television distribution head-ends, satellite television uplink centers, broadband or internet servers and the like. The television distribution network **104** may also distribute non-video content, such as electronic programming guide data and the like which is processed by the television receiver **108**.

The communication network **106** is operable to communicatively couple the call processing system **114** to the television receiver **108**. The television receiver **108** may bi-directionally communicate with the call processing system **114**, receiving commands from the call processing system **114** and transmitting video content to the call processing system **114**. The communication network **106** may also communicatively couple the television receiver **108** to other remotely located communication devices, such as computers, mobile telephones and the like. The communication network **106** may utilize any desired combination of wired (e.g., cable and fiber) and/or wireless (e.g., cellular, wireless, satellite, microwave, and radio frequency) communication mediums and any desired network topology (or topologies when multiple mediums are utilized). Exemplary communication networks include wireless communication networks, public switched telephone networks (PSTN), and local area networks (LAN) or wide area networks (WAN) providing data communication services.

In at least one embodiment, the television distribution network **104** and the communication network **106** may be combined into one or more physical or logical communication networks. For example, the television receiver **108** may receive video content over an internet protocol connection from the content source **102**. In at least one embodiment, the television distribution network **104** and the communication network **106** may be carried over one physical communication medium, but may be divided into discrete logical communication networks. For example, a cable television distribution network may carry television broadcast data and internet traffic over a single communication medium into a home, but the television broadcast data and internet traffic may be divided into discrete logical networks.

The television receiver **108** is operable to receive content from the television distribution network **104** and output the received content for presentation by the presentation device **110**. In at least one embodiment, the presentation device **110** is a display device (e.g., a television) configured to display content to a user **120**. The television receiver **108** may receive an audio/video stream in any format (e.g., analog or digital format) and output the audio/video stream for presentation by the presentation device **110**. In at least one embodiment, the television receiver **108** is a set-top box (e.g., a satellite tele-

vision receiver, cable television receiver, terrestrial television receiver, internet protocol television receiver or any other type of receiver/converter box) or other similar device that processes and provides one or more audio and/or video output streams to the presentation device **110** for presentation to the user **120**. The television receiver **108** may be further configured to output menus and other information that allow the user **120** to control the output of audio/video content by the television receiver **108**, view electronic programming guides, set recording timers and the like.

In at least one embodiment, the television receiver **108** is configured to transmit content to other devices through the communication network **106**. For example, the television receiver **108** may receive video content through the television distribution network **104**, format the content for transmission through the communication network **106** and transmit the content to a computer, mobile telephone, personal digital assistant (PDA) or other internet enabled device. The television receiver **108** may also transmit locally stored content, e.g., recorded content, to remote devices through the communication network **106**. In at least one embodiment, the television receiver **108** is operable to packetize the video content for transmission to remote devices. The operation of the video transmission functionality is described in further detail below.

The presentation device **110** may comprise any type of device capable of receiving and outputting a video signal in any format. Exemplary embodiments of the presentation device **110** include a television, a computer monitor, a liquid crystal display (LCD) screen, a touch screen and a projector. The presentation device **110** and the television receiver **108** may be communicatively coupled through any type of wired or wireless interface. For example, the presentation device **110** may be communicatively coupled to the television receiver **108** through a coaxial cable, component or composite video cables, an HDMI cable, a VGA or SVGA cable, a Bluetooth or WiFi wireless connection or the like. In some embodiments, the television receiver **108** and the presentation device **110** may be integrated as a device combining the functionality of a display device and a television receiver, such as a television with integrated CableCard functionality.

The user **120** may control the television receiver **108** using a remote control **112** or other type of data input device compatible with the television receiver **108**. The remote control **112** may comprise any system or apparatus configured to remotely control the output of content by the television receiver **108**. For example, the remote control **112** may include buttons for receiving input from the user **120**. In at least one embodiment, the remote control **112** includes a touch pad for receiving input from the user **120**. The remote control **112** may minimally include a transmitter, an input device (e.g., a keypad) and a processor or control logic for controlling the operation of the remote control **112**. The remote control **112** may communicate commands to the television receiver **108** requesting to playback content, temporally move through content (e.g., fast-forward or reverse), adjust the volume, access electronic programming guides, set or edit recording timers, edit preferences of the television receiver and the like. In some embodiments, the remote control **112** may additionally be configured to remotely control the presentation device **110**. The remote control **112** may communicate with the television receiver **108** and/or the presentation device **110** through any type of wireless communication medium, such as infrared (IR) signals or radio-frequency (RF) signals.

The telephone network **118** is operable to communicatively couple the telephone **116** with the call processing sys-

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tem **114**. The telephone **116** may comprise any type of communication device offering telephone service, including plain old telephone service (POTS), mobile communication services (e.g., wireless telephones), voice over internet protocol (VOIP) services and the like. The telephone network **118** may be any type of network, such as a public switched telephone network, cellular network, VOIP network or the like.

The call processing system **114** is configured to receive telephone calls from the telephone **116** through the telephone network **118**. Responsive to the telephone call, the call processing system **114** provides customer support to the user **120**. The customer support offered to the user **120** may be automated, semi-automated or live agent support, or any combination thereof, depending on desired design criteria. The call processing system **114** may include various components for answering phone calls and offering customer support, as described in further detail below. In at least one embodiment, automated systems of the call processing system **114** receive a phone call from the user **120**, identify the user **120** and direct the phone call to an appropriate agent for further support.

The call processing system **114** is further operable to communicate with the television receiver **108** through the communication network **106**. More particularly, the television receiver **108** is operable to transmit a video output stream to the call processing system **114** through the communication network. The call processing system **114** is operable to receive the video output stream and display the corresponding content to a customer support agent (not shown in FIG. 1). The customer support agent views the content output by the call processing system **114** to diagnose a problem with the television receiver **108** or associated transmission lines, applications or the like.

In at least one embodiment, the call processing system **114** is further operable to transmit commands to the television receiver **108**. The television receiver **108** may change its operational behavior responsive to the command. For example, the command may request the television receiver **108** to change channels, change inputs, access a particular menu, access video-on-demand content, recorded content, an electronic programming guide or a hidden diagnostic procedure. In at least one embodiment, the commands may be generated by the call processing system **114** responsive to user input from a customer support agent.

It is to be appreciated that the call processing system **114** may be operable to transmit any command which the user **120** can provide to the television receiver **108** using the remote control **112** and/or other input devices associated with the television receiver **108**, e.g., a front panel display, keyboard and the like. In at least one embodiment, the call processing system **114** may access the television receiver **108** in a special mode, allowing a customer support agent to initiate transmission of commands to the television receiver **108** that are inaccessible by the user **120**. For example, the customer support agent may be able to access diagnostic features of the television receiver **108** that are inaccessible using the remote control **112**.

In at least one situation, the user **120** experiences a problem with the television receiver **108** and desires assistance from customer support. The user **120** utilizes the telephone **116** to place a customer support phone call, which is answered by the call processing system **114**. The phone call is routed to a customer support agent (not shown in FIG. 1) of the call processing system **114**. The customer support agent decides to access the television receiver **108** and the call processing system **114** identifies the television receiver **108** associated with the user **120**. Depending on desired design criteria, the

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customer support agent may ask the user **120** for permission to access the television receiver **108** prior to initiating the communication.

The call processing system **114** then initiates a communication from the call processing system **114** to the television receiver **108**. In at least one embodiment, the television receiver **108** may authenticate the call processing system **114** prior to allowing access to the television receiver **108**. For example, the call processing system **114** may have authentication credentials which are generic to all television receivers **108** on a particular communication network or may have authentication credentials which are specific to the television receiver **108**. In at least one embodiment, the authentication credentials are stored in association with identifying information regarding the user **120**.

Responsive to authenticating the call processing system **114**, the television receiver **108** initiates transmission of a video output stream to the call processing system **114**. For example, the television receiver **108** may transmit the same video output stream as provided to the presentation device **110**. In some embodiments, the television receiver **108** may transmit a different video output stream to the call processing system **114**. For example, the television receiver **108** may enter a diagnostic mode and generate a video output stream that includes the content output to the presentation device **110** and that also includes additional diagnostic information and the like.

The call processing system **114** receives the video output stream and outputs the content to the customer support agent. In at least one embodiment, the call processing system **114** may be associated with a user input system, allowing the customer support agent the ability to provide input to remotely control the television receiver **108**. For example, the customer support agent may be presented with a virtual remote control that allows the customer support agent to change channels on the television receiver **108**, navigate menus and the like. Because the customer support agent is able to remotely access the television receiver **108**, they can see what is being output by the television receiver **108** and/or how the television receiver **108** responds to particular input. Thus, it is more likely that the customer support agent can diagnose/remedy a problem with the television receiver **108** for the user **120** during the phone call, making it less likely that a truck roll or return of the equipment is needed.

FIG. 2 provides additional detail about an embodiment of a television receiver **108A**. The television receiver **108A** includes a receiver interface **208**, a decoder **214** and a transcoder module **204**, as appropriate. The television receiver **108A** will be described in reference to the communication system **100** of FIG. 1. Other embodiments may incorporate additional or alternate processing modules from those shown in FIG. 2, may omit one or more modules shown in FIG. 2, and/or may differently organize the various modules in any other manner different from the exemplary arrangement shown in FIG. 2.

The television receiver **108A** may be logically and physically implemented in any manner. FIG. 2 shows various logical and functional features that may be present in an exemplary television receiver **108A**; each module shown in the figure may be implemented with any sort of hardware, software, firmware and/or the like. Any of the various modules may be implemented with any sort of general or special purpose integrated circuitry, for example, such as any sort of microprocessor, microcontroller, digital signal processor, programmed array and/or the like. Any number of the modules shown in FIG. 2, for example, may be implemented as a "system on a chip" (SoC) using any suitable processing cir-

cuitry under control of any appropriate controller **205**. In various embodiments, controller **205** executes within an integrated SoC or other processor that implements receiver interface **208**, transport selector **212**, decoder **214**, display processor **218** and/or disk controller **206**, as appropriate. In such embodiments, the integrated SoC processor may interact with a transcoder module **204** implemented with a separate processor as well as any other input or output devices to produce desired outputs based upon inputs received from local or remote users. In other embodiments, transcoder module **204** may also be incorporated into the SoC design. Broadcom Corporation of Irvine, Calif., for example, produces several models of processors (e.g., the model BCM 7400 family of processors) that are capable of supporting SoC implementations of satellite and/or cable receiver systems, although products from any number of other suppliers could be equivalently used. In still other embodiments, various distinct chips, circuits or components may be inter-connected and interrelate with each other to implement the receiving and decoding functions represented in FIG. 2.

Various embodiments of television receiver **108A** therefore include any number of appropriate modules for obtaining and processing media content as desired for the particular embodiment. For example, the television receiver **108A** may receive content through a satellite television distribution network, a cable television distribution network, an over-the-air (OTA) television distribution network, internet protocol television (IPTV) distribution network or the like, or any combination thereof, depending on desired design criteria. Each of these modules may be implemented in any combination of hardware and/or software using logic executed within any number of semiconductor chips or other processing logic.

Various embodiments of controller **205** can include any circuitry, components, hardware, software and/or firmware logic capable of controlling the various components television receiver **108A**. Various routines, methods and processes executed within television receiver **108A** are typically carried out under control of controller **205**, as described more fully below.

As noted above, many embodiments of television receiver **108A** include a receiver interface **208**, which is any hardware, software, firmware and/or other logic capable of receiving media content via one or more content sources **102** through the television distribution network **104**. Receiver interface **208** appropriately selects a desired input source and provides the received content to an appropriate destination for further processing. In various embodiments, received programming may be provided in real-time (or near real-time) to a transport stream select module **212** or other component for immediate decoding and presentation to the user. Alternatively, receiver interface **208** may provide content received from any source to a disk or other storage medium in embodiments that provide digital video recorder (DVR) functionality, such as the storage medium **202**. In such embodiments, television receiver **108A** may also include a disk controller module **206** that interacts with an internal or external storage medium **202**, such as a hard disk, magnetic, optical or flash memory and/or other device that stores content.

In the embodiment shown in FIG. 2, television receiver **108A** also includes an appropriate network interface **210**, which operates using any implementation of protocols or other features to support communication by television receiver **108A** on communication network **106**. In various embodiments, network interface **210** supports conventional LAN, WAN or other protocols (e.g., the TCP/IP or UDP/IP suite of protocols widely used on the Internet) to allow television receiver **108A** to communicate on communication net-

work **106** as desired. Network interface **210** typically interfaces with communication network **106** using any sort of LAN adapter hardware, such as a conventional network interface card (NIC) or the like provided within television receiver **108A**.

Transport stream select module **212** is any hardware and/or software logic capable of selecting a desired media stream from the available sources. In the embodiment shown in FIG. 2, stream select module **212** is able to generate video signals for presentation on one or more output interfaces **228**. In various embodiments, stream select module **212** is also able to provide an encoded video signal **236** to transcoding module **204**, although this feature is entirely optional. In such embodiments, however, transcoding module **204** would decode the video signal **236** for packetizing and subsequent transmittal over communication network **106**, as described elsewhere.

More typically, however, stream select module **212** responds to viewer inputs (e.g., via controller **205**) to simply switch encoded content received from the television distribution network **104** or from storage **202** to one or more decoder modules **214**. Television receiver **108A** may include any number of decoder modules **214** for decoding, decompressing and/or otherwise processing received/stored content as desired. Generally speaking, decoder module **214** decompresses or otherwise processes received content from stream select module **212** to extract an MPEG or other media stream encoded within the stream. The decoded content can then be processed by a display processor modules **218** to create a display for output to the presentation device **110** (see FIG. 1) in any appropriate format.

Display processor module **218** includes any appropriate hardware, software and/or other logic to create desired screen displays at interfaces **242**, **244**, **246** as desired. In various embodiments, display processing module **218** is also able to produce on screen displays (OSDs) for an electronic program guide, setup and control, input/output facilitation and/or other features that may vary from embodiment to embodiment. Such displays are not typically contained within the received or stored broadcast stream, but are nevertheless useful to users in interacting with television receiver **108A** or applications accessible through the television receiver **108A** and the like. The generated displays, including received/stored content and any other displays may then be presented to one or more output interfaces **228** in any desired format. In various embodiments, display processor **218** produces an output signal encoded in any standard format (e.g., ITU656 format for standard definition television signals or any format for high definition television signals) that can be readily converted to standard and/or high definition television signals at interface **228**.

In television receiver **108A**, a hardware or software switch **226** may also be provided that allows one or more output channels to be diverted to a transcoding module **204** for place shifting over the communication network **106**. For example, the television receiver **108A** may transmit content to remotely located devices, such as mobile telephones, computers, the call processing system **114** or the like. In such embodiments, switch **226** suitably re-directs output from one of the output channels (e.g., channel **228**) in decoded and decompressed form to the transcoding module **204** as appropriate. An output signal encoded in ITU656 format, for example, may be provided as an input to transcoding module **204** to support digital-to-digital conversion to a media format that can be readily transmitted on communication network **106**. In other embodiments, digital or analog signals may be provided to transcoder module **204** in any format.

To that end, transcoding module **204** is any hardware, software, firmware and/or combination thereof that is capable of producing a media stream capable of being routed on communication network **106** to a remote device. In various embodiments, transcoding module is implemented in a semiconductor chip having digital signal processing capabilities, such as a DAVINCI model processor available from the Texas Instruments Corporation of Dallas, Tex., although other embodiments may use any sort of processor or other circuitry (including the same processor or other circuitry used to implement any other components shown in FIG. 2) to implement the transcoding function. Generally speaking, transcoding module **204** receives either a decoded signal **234** decoded by decoders **214** or **216** (and optionally further processed by display processors **218** or **220**) or an already encoded stream **236**, performs a digital-to-digital conversion to create a media stream in a desired format and having desired parameters, and provides the converted stream for transport on communication network **106**.

FIG. 2 shows the output **238** of transcoding module **204**, which includes the placeshifted video stream, as being provided for transport using network interface **210**. In an alternate embodiment, a different network interface **210** could be provided, such as a stack residing within module **204** itself. In various embodiments, it may be desirable to secure any inter-chip communications between transcoding module **204** and other components of television receiver **108A** through any sort of physical or logical security techniques. Signals **234**, **236** and/or **238** may be provided on signal pins that are physically embedded within a printed circuit board, for example, to make access to such signals more difficult. Further, signals **234**, **236** and/or **238** may be encrypted or encoded between modules in any manner to prevent unauthorized usage in the event that such signals are physically intercepted.

In operation, then, placeshifting television receiver **108A** suitably receives one or more media streams from a DBS, cable or other content source **102**, which may be stored in storage **202** or the like as desired. Received and/or stored content may be provided in compressed form (e.g., signal **236**) and/or decompressed form (e.g., signal **234**) to transcoding module **204**, which appropriately converts the received signals to a format that can be transmitted to the remote device over network **106**. Control of the placeshifting process, including any communications related to security or authentication, may take place under the direction of controller **205** executing within television receiver **108A**.

As described above, the television receiver **108A** is operable to communicate with the call processing system **114** during a customer support request, allowing a customer support agent to remotely access/control the television receiver **108A**. During a customer support phone call by the user **120**, a customer support agent initiates access by the call processing system **114** to the television receiver **108A** through the communication network **106**. The call processing system **114** may provide authentication credentials (such as a username/password pair, password/pin number or the like), which are processed by the controller **205**, which then allows the call processing system **114** access to the television receiver **108A** responsive to verifying the credentials.

In at least one embodiment, the call processing system **114** then issues commands to the television receiver **108A**, which are received by the network interface **210** and processed by the controller **205**. For example, the customer support agent may request the television receiver **108A** to change channels and the controller **205** may command the receiver interface **208** to receive content from a different channel. The content

received by the receiver interface **208** is then routed to the transcoder module **204**, transcoded to an appropriate format for transmission through the network interface **210**, packetized and transmitted by the network interface **210** through the communication network **106** to the call processing system **114**.

In some embodiments, the customer support agent may remotely request to access various menus or other features of the television receiver **108A**. For example, the customer support agent may request to access a system information menu, which is generated by the controller **205** and transmitted to the call processing system **114** via the network interface **210**. The call processing system **114** then displays the information to the customer support agent for review.

Those of ordinary skill in the art will appreciate that the various functional elements shown as operable within the television receiver **108A** may be combined into fewer discrete elements or may be broken up into a larger number of discrete functional elements as a matter of design choice. Thus, the particular functional decomposition suggested by FIG. 2 is intended merely as exemplary of one possible functional decomposition of elements within the television receiver **108A**.

FIG. 3 illustrates an embodiment of a call processing system of FIG. 1. The call processing system **114A** will be described in reference to the communication system **100** illustrated in FIG. 1. The call processing system **114A** includes a processor **302**, a telephone interface **304**, a network interface **306**, an output interface **308**, an input module **310** and a storage medium **312**, all of which may be interconnected by one or more data buses **320**. The call processing system **114A** may be attached to or integrated with an input device **314** and a display device **316**. Each of these components is described in greater detail below. The call processing system **114A** may include other components, elements or devices not illustrated for the sake of brevity.

The processor **302** is operable for controlling the operation of the call processing system **114A**. As used herein, processor **302** refers to a single processing device or a group of inter-operational processing devices. The operation of processor **302** may be controlled by instructions executable by processor **302**. Some examples of instructions are software, program code and firmware. Various embodiments of processor **302** include any sort of microcontroller or microprocessor executing any form of software code. The processor **302** controls the reception of telephone calls by the telephone interface **304** and the reception and output of content by the network interface **306** and the output interface **308**. In at least one embodiment, the processor **302** is operable to generate menus, output by the output interface **308** to the display device **316**, which are utilized to assist customer support agents with the handling of calls from the user **120**.

The processor **302** may also be operable to run various call answering/call routing applications or scripts. For example, the processor **302** may have various interactive voice response applications which handle different types of phone calls, such as billing, customer support, new orders and the like. Some of the interactive voice response applications may be operable to route calls to a live agent, depending on desired design criteria.

The telephone interface **304** may comprise any type of interface (e.g., a call processing board) for receiving a phone call from the telephone **116** (see FIG. 1) through the telephone network **118**. In at least one embodiment, the telephone network **118** is embodied as a PSTN communicatively coupling the telephone interface **304** to the telephone **116** during a phone call. The telephone interface **304** answers/processes

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a received phone call to direct the phone call to other components of the call processing system 114 for processing of the phone call. For example, the telephone interface 304 may receive and digitize voice samples of the user 120 which are then processed by an interactive voice response application 5

The network interface 306 is connected to a communication network 106 (see FIG. 1) and provides bi-directional data transmission between the television receiver 108 and the components of the call processing system 114A. In at least one embodiment, the network interface 306 is an Ethernet connection or other type of NIC communicatively coupled to the internet or other type of local area of WAN. It is to be appreciated that other types of wired and wireless connections may be utilized, such as WiFi, depending on desired design criteria. 15

Output interface 308 includes any appropriate hardware, software and/or other logic to create desired screen displays for output to the display device 316. For example, the output interface 308 may receive video content originating from the television receiver 108 and may output the video content to the display device 316 for presentation to a customer support agent. The output interface 308 may connect to the display device 316 using an appropriate wired or wireless connection. In various embodiments, output interface 308 is also able to 20 produce on screen displays (OSDs) for data navigation, setup and control, input/output facilitation and/or other features that may vary from embodiment to embodiment. The display device 316 may comprise any appropriate apparatus, such as a monitor, television or the like.

In at least one embodiment, the display device 316 comprises a computer or similar device which remotely accesses the call processing system 114A. For example, the computer may receive video outputs from the output interface 308 via the communication network 106. Thus, the output interface 308 may provide displays to the network interface 306 for transmission to the display device 316 through the communication network 106. 25

The input module 310 is operable to receive user input from an input device 314, such as a keyboard, mouse, touch screen, microphone or the like. Any of these input devices may be directly connected to the call processing system 114A via the input module 310. In at least one embodiment, the input device 314 and the display device 316 may be integrated together, such as a touch screen device. The input device 314 and the display device 316 may also be embodied as a computer or other type of computing device that remotely connects to the call processing system 114A. Thus, the call processing system 114A may act as a server that customer support agents may connect to from various remote locations. 30

The storage medium 312 is operable to store various subscriber information, such as identifying information (e.g., name, address, contact information and the like), subscription plans, billing information and the like. In at least one embodiment, the storage medium 312 may store information identifying a network identifier for the television receiver 108 on the communication network 106. Thus, utilizing this information, the processor 302 may initiate communications between the call processing system 114A and the television receiver 108. The storage medium 312 may take the form of any type of storage device, such as a hard drive, flash memory, optical memory, random access memory (RAM), other type of magnetic memory and the like. 35

As previously described, the call processing system 114A allows a customer support agent to remotely access the television receiver 108. In practice, the user 120 places a phone call, which is received by the telephone interface 304. In at

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least one embodiment, the telephone interface 304 and the processor 302 cooperatively operate to identify the user and the reason for the phone call to appropriately route the call to a desired agent.

Once the phone call is routed to a customer support agent, the agent solicits information from the user 120 regarding the reason for their phone call (e.g., a problem with the television receiver 108). The customer support agent may then desire to remotely access the television receiver 108 and may request permission from the user 120 to access the television receiver 110. Responsive to the permission from the user 120, the customer support agent initiates the access and the processor 302 accesses the subscriber's information in the storage medium 312. In at least one embodiment, the user 120 may input information through the phone 116 allowing the processor 302 to access credentials for accessing the television receiver 108. 40

In at least one embodiment, the processor 302 retrieves a network identifier for the television receiver 108 and generates a message for transmission to the television receiver 108. The processor 302 then initiates transmission of the message to the television receiver 108 via the network interface 306. In at least one embodiment, the message may include authorization credentials for accessing the placeshifting capability of the television receiver 108. 45

Responsive to the message, the television receiver 108 generates a video output stream and transmits the video content to the call processing system 114A. The network interface 306 receives the video content and the processor 302 initiates output of the content to the display device 316 via the output interface 308. The customer support agent then views the video output and performs analysis to diagnose a problem with the television receiver 108. 50

In at least one embodiment, the customer support agent provides input, via the input device 314, requesting to remotely control the television receiver 108. For example, the display device 316 may display a virtual remote control which the customer support agent may provide input to remotely change channels, access menus, features and the like of the television receiver 108. The processor 302 receives the input and generates appropriate commands for transmission to the television receiver 108. The network interface 306 receives the commands and transmits the commands through the communication network 106 to the television receiver 108. The television receiver 108 may then change its operational state based on the command. Thus, the customer support agent is able to remotely control the television receiver 108, more easily diagnosing problems with the device. 55

Those of ordinary skill in the art will appreciate that the various functional elements shown as operable within the call processing system 114A may be combined into fewer discrete elements or may be broken up into a larger number of discrete functional elements as a matter of design choice. For example, one or more component may be embodied as servers located remotely with respect to each other. The various servers may then be communicatively coupled together through the data bus 320 and/or the communication network 106, depending on desired design criteria. Thus, the particular functional decomposition suggested by FIG. 3 is intended merely as exemplary of one possible functional decomposition of elements within the call processing system 114. 60

FIG. 4 illustrates an embodiment of a process for processing a customer support request. The process of FIG. 4 may not be all inclusive and may include other operations not illustrated for the sake of brevity. 65

The process includes receiving a telephone call from a user (operation 402). For example, a call processing system, as

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described above, may receive a phone call from a user and route the call to an appropriate customer support agent. In other embodiments, the user may simply call a phone line which is answered by a customer support agent.

The process further includes identifying a television receiver associated with the user (operation 404). For example, a call processing system may include a database for looking up a network identifier for the television receiver based on input provided by the user. The identification may be performed automatically, by the call processing system, based on information identifying the user (e.g., phone number, account number, name and the like) or may be performed manually by a user performing a database query of a subscriber database.

The process further includes connecting to the television receiver via a communication network (operation 406). For example, the call processing system may initiate a connection with the television receiver through the communication network using the aforementioned network identifier. The process further includes receiving video content, at the call processing system, from the television receiver (operation 408) and outputting the video content to an agent handling the telephone call (operation 410). The process may optionally include receiving user input from the agent at the call processing system (operation 412) and responsive to the user input, transmitting a command from the call processing system to the television receiver (operation 414).

Although specific embodiments were described herein, the scope of the invention is not limited to those specific embodiments. The scope of the invention is defined by the following claims and any equivalents therein.

What is claimed:

1. A method executable by a customer support system to process a customer support request from a user, the method comprising:

establishing a connection between the customer support system and a television receiver associated with the user via a communication network;

receiving video content from the television receiver associated with the user at the customer support system via the connection, wherein the video content is received as a video stream that contains television programming processed by the television receiver associated with the user; and

outputting the video content received from the television receiver associated with the user to a display for presentation to an agent handling the customer support request.

2. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

receiving input from a customer service agent at the customer support system;

responsive to the input, transmitting a command from the customer support system to the television receiver associated with the user over the communication network.

3. The method of claim 2, wherein the video stream received from the television receiver associated with the user is a placeshifted video stream that contains live television programming that is transcoded in real time from a live television broadcast received at the television receiver associated with the user.

4. The method of claim 2, wherein the input requests to initiate output of video on-demand (VOD) content through the television receiver.

5. The method of claim 2, wherein the input initiates a diagnostic procedure executed by the television receiver associated with the user.

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6. The method of claim 2, wherein the input requests to interact with an application operable on the television receiver associated with the user.

7. The method of claim 2, further comprising:

responsive to transmitting the command, receiving second video content at the customer support system from the television receiver via the communication network; and outputting the second video content to the display for viewing by agent.

8. A television receiver comprising:

a hardware receiver interface that receives input video data from a television distribution network;

a hardware network interface configured to communicatively couple to a communications network; and

a processing device communicatively coupled to the receiver interface and to the network interface, the processing device configured to:

establish a connection with a customer support system via the network interface;

receive a command, via the connection, from the customer support system;

initiate the encoding of a video stream from the input video data responsive to the command; and

initiate transmission of the encoded video stream to the customer support system via the network interface.

9. The television receiver of claim 8 further comprising a transcoding module configured to convert a broadcast video stream received via the television distribution network into the video stream in response to the processing device, and wherein the media stream is a placeshifted media stream formatted to be routable to the customer support system via the communications network.

10. The television receiver of claim 9, wherein the command requests the processing device to re-direct the input video data to the transcoding module.

11. The television receiver of claim 8, wherein the command requests the processing device to change a channel of the broadcast video stream and thereby change the content of the video stream generated by the transcoding module for transmission to the customer support system via the communication network.

12. The television receiver of claim 8, wherein the command requests the processing device to initiate output of video on-demand (VOD) content through the television receiver.

13. The television receiver of claim 8, wherein the command requests the processing device to initiate a diagnostic procedure that changes the video stream encoded by the television receiver.

14. The television receiver of claim 8, wherein the television distribution network comprises a satellite television distribution network.

15. The television receiver of claim 8, wherein the television distribution network comprises a cable television distribution network.

16. A customer support system to allow a customer service agent to respond to a support request from a user, the system comprising:

a processing device;

a network interface responsive to the processing device to establish a connection between a customer support system and a television receiver associated with the user via a communication network and to receive video content from the television receiver associated with the user at the customer support system via the connection, wherein the video content is received as a video stream

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that contains television programming processed by the television receiver associated with the user; and
 a display interface configured to output the video content received from the identified television receiver associated with the user to a display for presentation to the customer service agent handling the support request from the user.

17. The customer support system of claim **16**, further comprising:

a non-transitory storage medium that stores data associating information identifying the user with a network identifier for the television receiver associated with the user;

wherein the processing device uses the data to identify the television receiver and to establish the connection with the television receiver associated with the user using the network identifier.

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18. The customer support system of claim **16**, further comprising:

an input interface operable to receive an input from the customer service agent;

the processing device operable to generate a command responsive to the input and to initiate transmission of the command to the television receiver associated with the user via the connection to thereby execute the command on the television receiver associated with the user.

19. The customer support system of claim **18**, wherein the video content received from the television receiver via the communication network is a placeshifted video stream that is controlled by the customer support system.

20. The customer support system of claim **18**, wherein the command directs the television receiver associated with the user to initiate a diagnostic procedure through the television receiver to thereby change the video stream.

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